



Statement of

Jo-Anne Basile, Executive Director

CT Votes for Animals

In Opposition to

SB 1148 Authorizing Certain Killing and Hunting of Black Bear, Prohibiting Bird Feeders and Other Unintentional and Intentional Feeding of Potentially Dangerous Animals

SB 1149 An Act Eliminating All Restrictions for Sunday Hunting on Public and Private Property

Before the Environment Committee

March 10, 2023

Co-Chairs Senator Lopes and Representative Gresko, Vice Chairs Senator Hochadel and Representative Palm, Ranking Senator Harding and Representative Callahan, Honorable Members of the Environment Committee

CT Votes for Animals is a grass roots animal advocacy organization. CVA is dedicated to improving and protecting the lives of all CT animals by championing legislative changes at the CT General Assembly and mobilizing animal supporters in every legislative district of the state.

CVA is also a founding member of the CT Coalition to Protect Bears, a coalition of environmental and animal advocacy organizations dedicated to promote proven and science based non-lethal strategies that allow people and Connecticut's native black bears to co-exist peacefully. The CT Coalition to Protect Bears opposes hunting of our state's small bear population and supports humane policies for orphaned bear cubs. You have recently received our special report: The Truth About Black Bears in CT <https://ctbears.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/truthaboutCTsblackbearsREPORT.pdf>.

CT Votes for Animals strongly opposes SB 1148 and SB1149. Our members are shocked and saddened by the proposals before this committee. Because we are an animal advocacy organization you could expect our opposition. But we are opposed to these two bills for more reasons than that they will result in slaughtering many CT animals. By authorizing a bear hunt, SB1148 raises false expectations for CT residents

who are being told that killing bears will solve their problems. In fact, we know it will not. By expanding hunting to all days of the week throughout the state, the bill defies logic. Hunters and trappers are dwindling in numbers now representing a mere 1% of the state's population. Wildlife watchers should have more opportunities to enjoy Connecticut's rich natural resources in safety and peace. Hunters have an extremely disproportionate use of public lands available to them, and this should be corrected to reflect the changing demographics. If enacted, SB1149 will ensure that a peaceful walk in the woods on Sunday without concern of being hit by a stray bullet or other weapon will be no more.

Today you will hear from many about potential solutions to CT's bear/human interactions. You will also hear that experts in places other than CT and with far more experience with bears, agree that hunting is not the answer to these problems.

As currently written the lottery in SB1148 is indeed a "recreational or trophy hunt" tied up in a false promise that it will reduce the bear population and improve bear/human interactions in the northwest corner of the state. With the veil lifted, I believe this is not what Connecticut wants. Let's call it what it is and then have a debate about whether Connecticut residents want to have a bear hunt so hunters can adorn their walls with newfound trophies. I also believe legislators need to see the consequences of their vote to support a bear hunt in Litchfield County. At the end of my statement, I have attached several photos of bear hunts in New Jersey. They are gruesome and incredibly sad to see such majestic creatures tossed and maligned. This is what a yes vote to SB 1148 could bring to CT. Lest we not forget that DEEP already has the authority to kill "nuisance" bears", that is bears are who are or were a potential danger to persons or property. This makes a recreational hunt unnecessary. On average, DEEP kills between 4 to 6 bears a year classified as nuisance. If that is so, why does the Committee and DEEP call a hunt for 10 times that many in one year?

Black bears are naturally shy and they have no interest in us but they are interested in our food, especially our garbage which is abundant and too easily accessible.

According to DEEP, of all the bear "conflict" reports from 2022, 796 involved bird feeders, 1234 involved trash cans, 146 involved livestock and 35 involved beehives. All of these events are preventable.

What we do know is that a strong program of public education, aversion and removing food attractants – garbage, bird feeders from March to November, pet food outside, etc. works to mitigate bear/human interactions.

- 2014 Yosemite National Park reported a 92% decrease in human-bear conflicts due to public education and garbage/food containment programs.
- Programs to install and use bear resistant trash cans in Durango and Boulder Colorado resulted in significant reductions in bear nuisance calls and interactions.

- CT town ordinances which impose feeding bans (removal of bird feeders and other attractants) have had a range of success, depending on how long the program has been in place and how well it is enforced. Because bears don't understand town boundaries, if a feeding ban is not regional or statewide, in the end it will fail.

There is general agreement among experts that these programs work, nevertheless they have not been thoroughly implemented in CT even though we know there is a growing problem with bears that become habituated to neighborhoods. Rather in its place is a call for a bear hunt, a solution to nothing except as a recreational activity for hunters.

As a member of the CT Coalition to Protect Bears, CVA endorses the concepts behind HB 5160 which include a wildlife feeding ban, support for community-based conflict resolution grant programs and a program to develop protocols for orphaned cubs. Unfortunately, the Committee chose not to hear that bill.

SB1148 is clearly not the answer. CVA encourages the Committee to reject SB 1148 and in its place find agreement on a plan that provides for a comprehensive, non-lethal approach to peacefully coexist with wildlife. CT residents value this approach and deserve non-lethal effective solutions.

With respect to SB1149, CVA strongly opposes removing all restrictions on Sunday hunting. Several years ago, the legislature changed the law and allowed hunters to kill deer on Sundays using a bow and arrow. SB 1149 expands that authority by removing all restrictions on hunting of any animal on all state and private lands **seven days of the week**. Many spend weekends with family and friends walking in CT's woods and enjoying the abundance of wildlife. CT residents deserve at least one day a week to walk CT woods in peace and without fear of being hit by stray hunting bullets or startled by the crackling of firearms or more. Please reject SB1149: it's the wrong bill for Connecticut.

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Photos courtesy of Animal Protection League of New Jersey.



New York Times



Animal Protection League of NJ



Figure 1 Animal Protection League of NJ



Animal Protection League of NJ



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